

News from the Moderator

At the April 2 meeting of the Church Council, along with its other business, the Council took the following actions;

Study of Fitness Review Procedures. The Moderator was authorized to form a small committee to examine the fitness review procedures that now apply to UCC churches in Connecticut. The purpose will be to determine whether there are changes that might be made to the procedures to make them work better. I will be putting this committee together soon, but its work is likely to take several months. Since any changes would be made at one or another of the levels of the New London Association, the Connecticut Conference, and the national UCC, rather than at the local church level, this is a long term project. The congregation will be kept informed and input will be sought at appropriate times.

Discussion of Possible Change in Membership Categories. The Council decided to place on the agenda for discussion, without vote, at the MCC Annual Meeting on Sunday May 18, the following issue: whether Mystic Congregational Church should amend its bylaws to provide for a type of membership allowing persons to be members of Mystic Congregational Church without being members of the UCC, while keeping MCC in the UCC. The discussion, without voting, will take place after the formal business of the Annual Meeting is completed, that is, after approving annual reports and electing officers, boards and committees. The matter will be scheduled for a vote at a subsequent congregational meeting on Sunday, June 1. This will provide time for discussion and reflection before the vote, and allow the Annual Meeting to proceed efficiently. A draft of the proposed changes will be circulated to the congregation before the Annual Meeting. A change in the bylaws would require approval of two-thirds of the members present at the June 1 meeting, provided that a quorum is present. A quorum is five percent of the members.

Discussion of Possible Options for Missions Portion of Pledges. Also to be discussed without vote at the May 18 Annual Meeting is whether Mystic Congregational Church should allow members to choose individually on their pledge cards each year how to allocate the missions portion of their pledges. The missions portion has traditionally been 14% of pledges except on rare occasions when it has been less due to budget constraints. The suggestion is to let each member choose one of the following options for his or her pledge: either (i) 8% to the UCC Our Church's Wider Mission and 6% to local charities, as has been traditional; or (ii) 14% to OCWM; or (iii) 14% to local charities. The Missions Committee would continue to distribute the total dollars for each category as it has in the past. This will also be discussed, without voting, after the normal business

of the Annual Meeting is concluded, and will be presented for a vote at the subsequent June 1 meeting. No bylaw change is required for this, but the Council believes the congregation should make the decision. Under the bylaws, this action would require the approval of a majority of the members present at the June 1 meeting.

God Is Still Speaking Campaign. The Council asked the Board of Deacons to look at the God Is Still Speaking Campaign and to decide whether, when and how to bring this matter before the congregation, including how to provide a full description of what is involved in this campaign. In view of the other matters before us, this will probably take several months.

I believe that discussion of items 2 and 3 by the congregation on May 18, and then time for reflection and further discussion before the vote on June 1, will help us to make thoughtful decisions on these matters. These suggestions are intended to address the diversity of viewpoints among the congregation about our relationship with the UCC. They allow latitude for different points of view while keeping a relationship that has been very important to our church and to many of our members for fifty years. These proposals are not intended to be critical of the UCC, or of anyone who has supported the UCC over the years, or of the process by which we became affiliated with it. They are simply (i) a recognition that we have diverse views among us that do not seem likely to change anytime soon, and (ii) an effort and a desire to keep us all together and to minister to all of our members, whatever may be their views on the myriad of issues that confront any church today. Some members have suggested that we should wait until our next permanent pastor arrives to deal with these, in effect putting the burden on that person to find resolutions. I believe, however, that we will want any new pastor to be a pastor for all of us, and that any candidate who is likely to have the desire and the capacity to do that would want to us to do what we can to address these issues. I believe that pastors these days need and look for structure and participation from the congregation so that the whole burden is not upon their shoulders, and I believe that the proposals described in items 2 and 3 above will help in that respect. I encourage all of you to come to the Annual Meeting and express your views.

Hugh McGee, Moderator